**Real Peace**

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 (ESV)**

August 4, 2019

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***12*** *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* ***13*** *and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.* ***14*** *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* ***15*** *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* ***16*** *Rejoice always,* ***17*** *pray without ceasing,* ***18*** *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* ***19*** *Do not quench the Spirit.* ***20*** *Do not despise prophecies,* ***21*** *but test everything; hold fast what is good.* ***22*** *Abstain from every form of evil.*

***23*** *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***24*** *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

***25*** *Brothers, pray for us.* ***26*** *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.* ***27*** *I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.* ***28*** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

During World War II, several countries declared themselves to be neutral. They sought not to engage in fighting and claimed status as non-combatants. Some labeled these decisions as “peace-keeping” efforts. But as things are so often in times of war, many writers claim the reality is not so simple. Several articles in the past few decades have taken issue with one country in particular; a nation renowned for its promotion of peace. These writers claim this so called “neutral” nation did not survive the war without making a few tragic compromises. Some accusations related to covert weapon support through trade that enabled armed foreign troops. Others surround economic dealings that led to military support of certain nations, at great financial benefit to the so-called neutral country. Others deal with their choice to deny entrance to tens of thousands of refugees, at times handing victims directly to persecutors, knowing almost certain death would follow. In light of these and more complications, one writer said that their wartime neutrality appears to have been an illusion. Without getting into the complexity and tragedies of war, of which I claim great ignorance, one point seems fair. Claiming to be neutral is not always the same thing as proving to be peaceful.

The truth is that real peace rarely comes easily. In fact, it often requires taking a stand. And many times, it demands a fight. When I speak of fighting, I refer not to war and violence but to will and effort. It may seem counterintuitive, but this is the truth about ultimate peace. It will cost us dearly. It never happens automatically. And the moment we drop our guard, it begins to disappear. Real peace requires a fight. We recognize Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the God who will bring ultimate peace upon the world. And that’s why it’s not surprising that His followers were shocked at what He said in Matthew 10.

**Matthew 10:34-36** “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

Now His intent here is not political or violent. He is using war as a picture to describe that the peace He promises will not come immediately but ultimately. And it will come in a way that through the course of its arrival, will be costly and painful. And in that sense, real peace will require a fight.

Paul knew the kind of peace that God promises and that the Thessalonians longed for, would take effort. But He believed it was worth it. It would require a fight against their flesh; a fight to say no to worldly desires. It would require a stand against persecution and a willingness to suffer. It would require a courageous determination to seek others’ good, even entering into difficult conversations and even confrontation for the purpose of growth. He knew real peace would require a fight, but He believed it was worth it.

True peace is not neutral, and neither is it passive. It is not automatic, and neither is it indifferent. You can be in a household that is quiet, but it doesn’t mean there is peace. Some people can go years without speaking and silence, and that doesn’t mean that there is peace. Churches since the time of Paul all the way to today, have proven to be an intense battleground for peace.

And we as a church both universal and at times local, have not always done the best job at seeking it out. It’s incredibly difficult! It’s something worth praying for, worth fighting for. It’s unity we’re called to enjoy and defend from the Spirit. It’s something that we should seek, something that we should let rule, something we should strive for. It’s a way of life to pursue and it’s something that all too often escapes our grasp as division and conflict finally starts to grab hold. We recognize in a broken world that sometimes this peace does not come immediately and sometimes this peace, for a time, is redirected or even delayed. We realize that there are uniquely difficult circumstances that require special measures, even for people like Paul who experienced some conflict in his life and peace temporarily escaped him. We know that’s not God’s ideal. And even though that may occur, we can never choose to settle permanently. The wishes of our father in heaven would be like that of many fathers desperately longing for their children to be at peace. We sometimes realize that it’s not fully in our hands, but what does lie in our hands we do our best with, to seek it out. Real church means real peace. And real peace is worth fighting for.

So where is the battle raging? Where are we to fight for peace? That’s the question before us today. Where are the battle grounds on which we must wage this war? We need to identify them so that we can be ready for the effort required. Regardless of how much these battles may cost us, despite how deep the wounds may cut, real spiritual peace is always worth the fight. And so Paul gives us some words of advice addressing these various battlegrounds for peace. And these final words of advice show the places where our war for peace will be fought. And this morning, we’ll look at six words of advice that are cherished by churches that fight for peace; six battlegrounds.

**#1 On Leadership: A Respect To Grant To God’s Shepherds (12-13)**

This is a word of advice on how to relate to God’s shepherds. This is one place where peace matters deeply; amongst church leaders and members. And to address this combat zone, Paul highlights the respect that church members are to grant God’s shepherds. And when we say “respect,” we’re talking about esteem or appreciation. It’s a choice to regard a position through an admiration and respect for God that manifests in how we speak and our tone and our conduct. It’s the opposite of treating someone lightly or criticizing. It’s an honor. True biblical respect is a reverence for God that manifests in how we treat

authorities like our parents, like our teachers, public officials, and then here in verses 12 and 13, leaders at church.

***12*** *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* ***13*** *and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

This is a place where peace matters, in the issue of leadership. In this call for respect, Paul is not using the language of forceful requirement here, but it’s a friendly request. He’s speaking encouragingly and in a friendly way. And he does so from two angles. Two issues surface. First, he explains who we are to respect, and then second, how. First, the ones we are to respect and then the way in which we’re to do it. So first, who we are to respect.

The focus is upon the spiritual leaders in the church, leaders of which the New Testament uses several words to describe. Three come to mind: elders, overseers, and shepherds. Each of the terms are overlapping and interchangeable, but they sometimes carry a slight nuance. The term “elder”emphasizes spiritual maturity, typically. The term “overseer”emphasizes perhaps their spiritual authorityand oversight. And then the term “shepherd”emphasizes their spiritual responsibility and care. All three describe the same role: a leader in the church. There is one definite article here followed by three participles, which just means that all of the functions that he describes about these people are not different categories, but they’re the same, the leaders. And he centers on the actions that mark these leaders, the endeavors that they pursue as leaders: their work, their role and their charge. It’s the labor they perform, the position they possess, and the burden they accept. This is who we are to respect. He says first, note their work, their labor they perform, the ministry that they have.

***12*** *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you*

Labor means hard work. It means toil to the point of exhaustion. Some people in Thessalonica had heard Jesus was coming back and that had caused them to sort of rest on their heels and to give up working at any sort of hard labor. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6 we see that they actually had succumbed to this tendency to laziness. But that’s not the example that spiritual shepherds are to set. So the word here is emphasized that they’re not spiritually lazy, but they’re spiritually sweaty, as it were. They’re laboring hard. Their job is to toil by God’s strength on behalf of the sheep to feed and to lead, to warn and to guard, to pray for them, to preach to them, to counsel with them, to encourage among them, to admonish them from things, all in love. And it’s no easy task! When it’s done rightly, biblically, it costs everything a man can give. This isn’t a superstar shepherd. This is just basic shepherding, and it’s no joke.

I was having lunch with someone this week, and I was just getting to know them. They asked me, “What’s it like to preach?” I find that to be a difficult question to answer, but I said it’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. It feels like it almost crushes me every time. I’ve watched men who have preached for a long time, and I see how much the burden they carry to stand up and to try to speak on behalf of God to people that he cares about and loves and that he knows. As a sinful man, it’s almost crushing. He looked at me and he said, “Good. I’m glad. You should feel that way.” (Laughter!) And you know, I do. I think he recognized what this truly means, to stand in a way that you try to bring the hope of God to His people. You can’t do it perfectly, and that is intense. And we recognize that this is the job. Ministry, the labor they perform, the first endeavor, their work is something that we recognize as a position that we can respect, even when they don’t do it perfectly. That’s a more general endeavor, but to get more specific and even harder to swallow, he says to note their role, the position they possess.

*and are over you in the Lord*

It’s not so hard to respect the ministry, but then our flesh rubs against the idea of

respecting authority. That’s just describing the place that they stand. There’s a sense in which they have not political, but spiritual responsibility and accountability to God. And so they are under God, but they are over us, and we acknowledge the role that they have to maintain in ordering God’s household, in overseeing. Hebrews 13:17 describes this and they are hard words in our culture, to hear.

**Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

It’s authority that we recognize has been grossly abused in far too many churches and very subtly in others. And in those ways, it’s not being exercised biblically. The biblical role of a leader is essentially spiritual. It’s supposed to be eminently humble. And it’s supposed to be obviously plural, where people are speaking and this is the position that they possess, this role of leadership. They care for the church over the people but under God. And they’re to exercise that authority faithfully, carefully, gently, biblically, lovingly. This is their role. Third, he notes their charge, the burden they accept. These are the ones who

*admonish you,*

They give instruction. It’s the idea of instruction toward change, of recognizing there are problems to address. It’s not fun to swallow on either side. It’s like in a home with children and parents or in the work place with managers and employees. Admonishment is not fun, but when it’s needed, it’s healthy and appropriate. And this is the burden that they accept. This will be an endeavor that they have; their work, their role and their charge. These are our shepherds; their ministry, authority and duty. This is who we are to respect. And how are we to do that? We go from the endeavors of the leaders, to some encouragement for the members. Here is how we are to respect our leaders, some encouragements for us to heed. First, respect them highly.

***13*** *and to esteem them very highly*

This is a high regard. It’s a word that just talks about beyond measure. It’s sort of without reservation. It’s a respect that when you think about them, speak to them or of them, pray for them, that you hold them in high regard. And second, respect them lovingly.

*in love*

There is a sense of affection, here. It’s a choice to fuel in our hearts a caring love for them. Highly, lovingly, respect them. And third, respect them appreciatively. A reason we honor them is

*because of their work.*

We consider what it is that they’re doing and that they’re putting their lives on display to be scrutinized and examined for how they’re living for God and speaking for God. And because of this work that they do, to care for people and serve on behalf of the Lord, there is a respect that should be offered appreciatively. And then fourth, respect them harmoniously.

*Be at peace among yourselves.*

I think he’s just talking about the entire fellowship, for the members interacting with each other, but also for the leaders and the members. There’s a harmony, a peace that is to be sought. In the context of a cursed world, this is no small task. There’s going to be rebellion that can provoke, authority that can be abused. There’s going to be respect that can be withheld. There’s going to be contempt that can fester, mutiny that can spread, anarchy that can reign. Throughout Scripture, there are spiritual leaders and followers who have just wrestled with nonstop unrest. From Moses to Malachi, from Jesus to John, and throughout, we see that the best of leaders at times had the worst of followers, and that the worst of leaders had the best of followers. And we see that when it comes to God’s people, the aim is always to fight for peace on this battleground. Right, true, pure peace; this is a picture of how God’s kingdom operates. It’s not in anarchy, but in peace. Real peace matters deeply amongst church leaders and members. It’s worth fighting for.

The fact of the matter is that no one fully deserves this kind of respect that Scripture commands. Every leader is fallen and sinful. We show respect not because of the leader, but because of our heavenly father. We respect His rule by respecting those He puts in charge.

One of the things that utterly amazes me is the kind of respect that I receive, that I do not deserve. Honor that is given to me from people with thrice as much experience or far more skill, much more wisdom, and a far more dedicated track record of righteousness than I’m going to reach in the next four decades. And yet, these people treat me with respect. People who have watched me fail repeatedly, people who have borne the brunt of my inexperience and selfishness, they show me honor in such a way that my children think that what I get to do in serving and being even as a youth pastor, is an honorable position. They think, “Whoa!” because of how honorably people treat me. They show me a respect that I don’t deserve. And you know what? These people teach me about Jesus with the kind of respect that they show because they have a respect not for me so much as they do for God. And in that way, I experience and understand a sense of peace that is totally different than the world would offer. It’s a battleground for sure! It matters here to fight for peace among both leaders and members. There’s more that could be said, but we are running through rapid advice from Paul and he moves to the next battleground swiftly.

**#2 On Discipleship: A Discernment To Develop For God’s Ministry (14)**

This is a word of advice on how to do God’s ministry. Verse 14 describes what makes peace so hard. This is why it’s hard to experience. It’s because people are sinners. They have problems and the problems are different. As we interact as a church in following Jesus together and we try to help each other do that, we recognize that we need discernment about how to help each other. It’s discernment that we’re to develop for God’s ministry. By “discernment” we mean the ability to tell the difference between things that are right and wrong, to perceive and recognize and identify and diagnose what people are facing, and then tailor our treatment or our care for them, accordingly.

There was a girl who was 16 when the pains began, and the doctors didn’t take her seriously. They misdiagnosed her time and again. They thought she was maybe overstressed or depressed. It was years before they discovered the actual cause and diagnosed her and she was able to have a treatment that actually helped. Determining someone’s condition accurately is an essential part of being able to treat them properly. And to do that spiritually, we need discernment.

What makes peace so hard is that people have problems. We all have difficulties, don’t we? And that makes it hard. The ministry of discipleship, helping people follow Jesus, is so hard to achieve because we need discernment about the kind of problems people are facing. And here’s a few observations about the kind of discernment that discipleship ministry requires. Here are four questions that Paul answers. First, how much do we need this kind of discernment? In verse 14, you look at the intensity of the need and Paul’s plea. He says

***14*** *And we urge you, brothers,*

If verse 12 was a friendly request, this is a desperate plea. “We urge you brothers to do this.” And here are some strong commands. Here is who we need to be discerning about. There are three conditions that he raises that are distinct, that we need to discern between. He is urging you to treat these people differently. These are the conditions. First, idleness. And then second, he addresses faintheartedness. And then third, he addresses weakness.

By the idle, he’s talking about the disorderly. This is a word describing soldiers out of rank who are insubordinate and not in step with others. They are spiritually disorderly. By faintheartedness, he is describing the doubtful; those who are anxious or sorrowful about the future. They’re worried about the end times or what this promise of Christ’s return is. They’re just not sure and they’re doubtful. Then third, we look at the weakness that he addresses. He addresses the weak. These are the spiritually depleted. It is those who lack defense morally and spiritually. They are weak in such a way that they’re struggling with the Christian walk, whether it’s with sin or with faith. They’re just depleted. These are conditions that we need to discern between and they require various treatments. He gives you those treatments that are relevant to these issues. The first is admonishment. For those who are idle, they need admonishment. They need not a harsh condemnation, but a loving warning and correction.

*admonish the idle,*

For the fainthearted, they need encouragement. The timid need comfort. He says

*encourage the fainthearted,*

And then for the weak, they need support or help. He says

*help the weak,*

So you need discernment to rightly diagnose the problem and then offer the relevant treatment to these people. You say, “How long do we do that? How quickly does that treatment work? How quickly should we expect recovery?” And we see discernment is needed. There’s a constant mindset Paul gives us of patience. It is needed for a long time. He says

*be patient with them all.*

You see, if there’s these categories of the disorderly, categories of the doubtful and those who are depleted, this fourth might be that people are just tempted to be done. I’m tired of helping, helping, helping. And Paul says, “Be patient.” There’s a battleground here that will test our peace as a church. Are we willing to discern where people are at and help them with the problems that they face? Real peace is hard because people have problems. And when we say “people,” we mean us, me. We have problems and we make peace hard, but it is worth fighting for through discernment and discipleship.

**#3 On Fellowship: A Culture To Cultivate In God’s Family (15-18)**

This is a word of advice on the culture we are to cultivate in God’s family. This is what real peace feels like; the culture. It’s how Jesus’ fellowship, His family is to interact. By “culture,” we’re talking about the attitudes and behaviors that make our church distinct, who we are, the atmosphere or the feel of our community. It’s the way the fellowship feels. Countries have culture. States and cities and businesses, organizations, families have cultures. These atmospheres can be healthy and they can be toxic.

It was just a few weeks ago that a report surfaced about a toxic waste dump that was discovered in Melbourne. It was a spot where there was up to 1.6 million liters of harmful chemicals illegally dumped. It is in situations like this where there is toxic influence, it can threaten and even eliminate growth and health in an area. Side effects and symptoms spread, and the possibility of catching fire is increased exponentially. Culture can become like this. It can be healthy or toxic. And Paul looks back and thinks about leadership and some of the conflict that can arise there. And then in discipleship and when people have problems and we’re not doing well with it, then sometimes culture can be contaminated or polluted. And he says, “Cultivate this kind of culture.” This is what you should be seeking to advance. If you aren’t positively helping, then you are negatively influencing. You can’t be neutral about culture. It’s either helping or hurting what you’re doing. And Paul says, “Do this in the fellowship.”

***15*** *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* ***16*** *Rejoice always,* ***17*** *pray without ceasing,* ***18*** *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

That’s the kind of culture, that’s what peace feels like. We’ll just draw out four kinds of soil to nurture, to help this culture of peace be experienced. The first is constant forgiveness.

***15*** *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.*

If you have people with problems, which we do...I’m in this church, so I know we do. If you try to do a ministry of discipleship, which is hard, I know. I know it is because I see people, and I make it hard. So I know we have that. And if we have people who are disorderly, some who are doubtful, others who are depleted, and others who are just done, then we recognize there is going to be a temptation to seek to repay someone for evil, to withhold good. And Paul says to the whole congregation, this is your responsibility, to see to it that that doesn’t happen. Cultivate a soil amongst you of constant forgiveness. Invest in that. We expend energy not to seek the downfall of our offenders, but their welfare. This is hard stuff. It’s impossible stuff without the Spirit of God. Create a culture of forgiveness, but also a culture of persistent joyfulness.

***16*** *Rejoice always,*

Yesterday, should I have been rejoicing? Yes. Today? Yes. Tomorrow? Yes. Rejoice always. What about when…? Yes. Always! No matter what circumstances we face. All the friction in the leadership, all the friction in the fellowship and the discipleship? Yes. Rejoice! You’re going to be tempted to settle into disappointment and to depression and despair. Rejoice! Have a persistent joyfulness. And then third, cultivate an incessant prayerfulness.

***17*** *pray without ceasing,*

He’s not talking about some kind of muttering mantra, but a reoccurring prayer that is just a settled dependence on God, where we lift our hearts to God constantly and spontaneously throughout the day. It’s this rhythm of trusting Him in prayer. Forgiveness, joyfulness, prayerfulness, and fourth, thankfulness.

***18*** *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

This is a resilient thankfulness. Give thanks in all circumstances. No matter what kind of situation we find ourselves, as a Christian, there’s never a time where we have the right to withhold the gratitude God is due. This is the kind of culture that should permeate Jesus’ church. And the last phrase just seems to wrap it like a bow around the whole gift of these four commands. It’s just saying

*for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

This is what He wants. While the Old Testament Law could define and describe it somewhat, as a fallen human, we can never fully manifest it or embody it until the Spirit of God was given to transform us from the inside out and make these kinds of commands possible for us to obey. We can honor God by the power of the Spirit and bear that kind of fruit in our lives through this sort of soil and culture that God would manifest. This kind of peace, do you know what this feels like? If this were really to happen, do you know what it feels like? It feels like heaven. That’s worth fighting for, isn’t it? But oh, how difficult it is to fight for a culture of fellowship that would be like that. It’s a battleground.

**#4 On Worship: A Devotion To Give To God’s Teaching (19-22)**

We have to keep moving fast, here. The advice from Paul is just coming rapid fire at us. Here is the devotion that we’re to give God’s teaching. Here is how peace happens and what it’s going to take. Here are a few thoughts on worship. Devotion is the loving worship that we give to God. The context of teaching is helpful here.

***19*** *Do not quench the Spirit.* ***20*** *Do not despise prophecies,* ***21*** *but test everything; hold fast what is good.* ***22*** *Abstain from every form of evil.*

We’re looking at both the negative and the positive side, here. So first is what devotion avoids. You see in this sort of soil, there are some devotion-killing weeds that we need to avoid. In verses 19-20 there are two weeds he points out. The first we might call spiritual independence.

***19*** *Do not quench the Spirit.*

We have sort of a self-trust that diminishes God’s work. Quench means to stifle or suppress or put out a fire. God’s Spirit is working and we see that culture and what God desires to bring about through the teaching and the gifting of the Holy Spirit, and where somehow, people were tempted to sort of suppress that, to stifle it, to avoid it and to be independent of it and say, “We can do without that.” And Paul says, “Don’t do that.” We’re not sure why that was happening, but there is a clear sense in this command to stop quenching the Spirit. Don’t do that. And there is not only independence, but also spiritual defiance. Whatever the relational tension was, or some of the disorder was, Paul has to say

***20*** *Do not despise prophecies,*

At this point in the church’s maturity, they didn’t have the New Testament. We have it today. They were dependent upon instruction from the apostles and for the gift of prophecy to hear how God was teaching His people. And at some point, something was happening that caused relationships to rift or people were overselling prophetic claims. Maybe people were wrongly applying the prophecy of Christ’s return and so for whatever reason, they said, “You know what? We don’t need that so much.” And they were despising the prophecy. They were defying the teaching because they had a bad taste in their mouths. They had been soured to it. And Paul says, “No, that’s going to ruin your worship. You have to be discerning about the truth, but you can’t despise it.” Avoid spiritual independence and defiance. These are weeds that will kill this culture that we’re talking about. Instead, here is how you should show healthy devotion positively. He gives some techniques to use or even tools to aid our devotion in worship. First, he kind of presses again on this idea of discernment with truth. Show continual discernment in everything,

***21*** *but test everything;*

You don’t despise the teaching, but it’s still subject to be discerned and to be tested. And one of many reasons is this: not all things supernatural come from God. There is inspiration for spiritual instruction that doesn’t come from above. It comes from below. So test everything. Show discernment in what you hear. Test it according to the criteria of God’s truth and discern between good and evil. It’s continual discernment. And then show moral dedication to what is good. Once you test it and you say, “This is right and it’s truthful according to what God has shown us is loving and good and true,” then you need to cling to it.

*hold fast what is good*

Grab hold of it. Bind yourself to it. That’s the positive side. And on the flip side, he says to have dedication for good, but then show distinction from evil. Avoid or

***22*** *Abstain from every form of evil.*

It’s distinction! You need to stay clear of the false counterfeit offers that would come your way, but also be good stewards of the true spiritual investment that God gives. It’s a devotion to teaching in all the right ways. And this is what is going to promote the growth of true peace. It’s what it’s going to take. Real peace happens when we let God’s Word shape our lives. That’s how we fight for it; through devotion to His Word and worship.

So far, on every single one of these battlegrounds, I have failed. I could give you specific examples of how I’ve failed. But here’s a battleground that is out of my hands. We’ll call it the battleground of Lordship. This is a comfort to you. If you think, “I haven’t done great at that, and as a church, we haven’t done great at that,” here’s a comfort for you in number 5.

**#5 On Lordship: A Reliance To Exercise In God’s Power (23-24)**

This is a word of advice on the reliance we are to exercise in God’s power. When it comes to this battleground, we’re told where real peace comes from.

***23*** *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***24*** *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

This is where it comes from. It comes from God. We won’t know the kind of peace that He desires until we exercise reliance on His power and we trust Him. This is the prayer that Paul offers on their behalf. And the basis of His prayer is who he prays to. It’s the God of peace. This is the one on whom he relies. In the actual petition, he makes two requests. The first goal that he would seek from God is total sanctification. This is just a fancy word for saying being set apart for God.

***23*** *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,*

He prays that there would be complete life change in the church where they would be entirely changed and set apart as wholly and purely God’s. It is a completely mature and finished work. He asks for total sanctification. And second, he asks for ultimate preservation.

*and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

He prays that we would not only experience total life change, but that we would be entirely guilt-free. It’s that every spot and blemish would be removed. There would be no accusations available and we would be blameless. It is entire in extent: spirit, soul and body. It’s all of us in its ultimate occasion, that one day when Jesus returns. It’s to be totally blameless. This is an amazing request! And why does he rely on God to do this? Well, there is a three-fold promise that he trusts and you can see it there in verse 24.

***24*** *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

He trusts in God’s calling. He says, “God, you’re the one who started this. We trust in your calling. You are the one who began this work. And second, we trust in your character. You are faithful.” God is faithful and true. He finishes what he starts. He follows through His intentions and we trust His conduct. Because of who He is and what He’s done, we can be sure that He will do it. This is the power of Lordship. It’s that we know real peace comes from Him. And that’s how the fight is won. It’s through God. Because He started it, He will finish it. And we can trust through reliance on His Lordship. The last battleground just briefly is relationship.

**#6 On Relationship: A Resolve To Maintain As God’s People (25-28)**

This is a word of advice on the resolve we are to maintain as God’s people. Here is who it is that we seek peace with. Here are some thoughts on relationship. There are a few resolutions that Paul highlights for them to consider.

***25*** *Brothers, pray for us.* ***26*** *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.* ***27*** *I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.* ***28*** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

Here is relationship with God’s people. And it requires a commitment, some resolutions. First, pray for God’s saints. Second, love His church. And third, read His Word. For whatever reason, there may have been some temptation for them to not read this letter to the whole church. And Paul puts them under oath and switches the first person to say, “Look, I’m telling you to do this. Read God’s Word. Acknowledge what He teaches and speaks through His teachers in the right way.” And then fourth, the ending resolution is to trust God’s grace. And probably Paul finished this letter by signing it in his own handwriting with this signature ending.

***28*** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

This is the gift of God through which all of this is accomplished. It’s through the grace of Christ. All of these phrases combine to reinforce the reality and the necessity of human relationships. The context in which all of these things happen is in real human relationship. And the fact that we’re reading a letter between these people and recognizing that God knows we’re in a real mess with real people and this is the context in which we fight for peace. It’s not to be sought apart from God’s people, but among them. Real church means real peace. Fighting for that kind of peace is always worth it.

One of the fun parts of working at a college was seeing parents drop off their freshman students for the first time. They would come with their children and they would have this orientation experience and then there would be a moment where they would have to part. And at that good-bye there was this sudden explosion of emotion and affection and advice. The moms would sit there and give rapid fire advice. “Brush your teeth. Stay away from drinking. Study hard. Write often.” You’re thinking, can they just digest all that advice right now? I don’t think so. And if you read the end of Paul’s letter, you almost feel the same way. He gives rapid fire commands. In those moments where the parents are just dropping this barrage of advice, the children do their best to take it in, but ultimately, they just know that the point is the love that they have and the longing that the parent has for them to experience lasting peace, and just the gift to know it really comes from God. And we look at this. We do our best, but at the end of the day, we just rest in that embrace of God and Jesus Christ and say, “God, we need your help to do this!” It’s to Him that we entrust ourselves this morning. May He make us this kind of church. May we be in every way, real.